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## **An Experiential, Inclusive Approach to Hope**

### **Introduction**

Contemporary accounts of hope turn away from religious connotations, or tendencies to focus only on future goods, instead studying hope as a rational and ubiquitous feature of human life (Pettit 2004, 153). In this context, philosophers commonly draw on the *Standard Account* (Meirav 2009, 218) account of hope, which proposes two independently necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for hope: 1) that the object of hope must be desired by the hoper, and (2) that achievement of the object is viewed by the hoper as neither certain nor impossible (the ‘estimative and desiderative’ criteria for hope; see Downie 1963, 248f).<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, the philosophical literature tends to obscure actual experiences of hope, and inadequately attends to the importance of agent self-perception and developmental factors leading to hope. This kind of theorizing leaves important gaps in our understanding of the phenomenon, particularly regarding the characteristics of a hopeful experience. This lack of clarity is apparent given several philosophers’ recent bids to supplement the Standard Account’s criteria.<sup>2</sup> Psychological researchers have also recently worked to clarify how people experience hope, with a notable focus on the hopers’ developmental histories and self-perceived agency. I argue that philosophers’ oversights of these factors lead them to counterintuitive descriptions of hope. Further, I submit that taking cues from psychological studies will help incorporate relevant

agent-specific factors into philosophical accounts of hope, in turn helping to clarify what is lost by subscribing to the Standard Account.

# **I. What Has Been Lost: On the Standard Account's Bare-Bones Approach**

In the contemporary literature on hope, two commonly cited attempts to explicate hope are R. S. Downie's 1963 article "Hope," and J. P. Day's 1991 book *Hope: A Philosophical Inquiry*. Downie states that "there are two criteria which are independently necessary and jointly sufficient for hope [...] the first is that the object of hope must be desired by the hoper [...] and] the second criterion is that the hoper must at least believe that the fulfilment of the hope falls within a certain range of probabilities" (Downie 1963, 248). Day offers his own formulation of the two conditions: "'A hopes in some degree that P' entails (1) 'A wishes [desires] in some degree that P' and (2) 'A thinks that P is in some degree probable' [...] and] may be called the desiderative and the estimative tests (Downie 1963, 98).

Although these two conditions are said to be critical features of hope, both philosophers briefly mention some of hope's further complexities that they do not deem critical to their accounts. One of the main concerns, according to Downie, is that "there is a certain conceptual connection between 'hope to do' and 'intend to do'" (Downie 1963. 251) that means hoping also entails a will to *act* to bring about what is hoped for. Day echoes this concern, adding that "'A wishes that P' entails 'A is disposed to try to bring it about that P'" (Day 1991, 98), thus highlighting the relevance of a hoper's *willingness to act* as a significant characteristic of at least some cases of hope. I may desire that I receive a good grade on an assignment, and I may estimate that this is neither impossible nor certain. According to the Standard Account, this would rightly be called "hope." However, in cases where relevant action can be taken, questions arise as to whether my desire for a good grade, combined with my belief in the possibility of

receiving this grade, really merit the name “hope” if I am not at least *willing to do* anything to bring this about. In fact, it seems that this would be more rightly called an instance of “wishing” or even “wishful thinking” on my part, since a “hope” on which I am unwilling to act (when I am able to) seems in bad faith. The failure to further develop the connection between hope and a disposition to act indicates that more can be said with regards to hope’s relation to action.

A related complication for Downie and Day involves explaining their claim that “the object [of hope must fall] within a range of physical probabilities” (Downie 1963, 249), i.e. between certainty and impossibility in order to constitute hope. If one *believes* the object of their hope to be probable or likely to come about, then, according to Day, some of the standards used to evaluate the reasonableness of beliefs should also apply to hopes. He notes, however, that while we *can* say “‘A’s hope that P’ is reasonable although P is improbable” (Day 1991, 101), the same does not seem to hold for beliefs. If I live in Los Angeles, and I believe that it will snow this December, this belief could be deemed unreasonable, due to the improbability of snow in Los Angeles. Replace my belief for a *hope* that it will snow, and it’s not so easy to dismiss this hope as unreasonable; after all, it *has* snowed in Los Angeles before!<sup>3</sup> This disanalogy between beliefs and hopes uncovers questions about the role of implicit or explicit probability assignments involved in hope. The Standard Account tells us that we need view a hope as neither certain nor impossible, but it seems further investigation is needed to draw out rules for rational or appropriate probability thresholds. This is another case in which the Standard Account hints at another of hope’s complexities without developing it in detail: although it seems clear that an agent’s desire for a hoped-for prospect may affect its perceived likelihood (thus making hope different from belief) the standard account says little about the rationality of hope and its relationship to evidence.

Lastly, Downie notes that if hope implies a state of “comparative expectation” (Downie 1963, 250) it entails the exhibition of behavioural patterns “accompanied by characteristic pleasurable feelings” (Downie 1963, 250). In other words, if hope involves expecting or anticipating an outcome comparatively more than merely believing in the *possibility* of that outcome, or despairing of it, then hope should also entail relevant differences in the agent’s *behaviour*. For example, if Sally hopes for a snow day, but Alex simply believes the snow day to be possible, we might say that Sally is in a state of comparative expectation with regards to the possibility of a snow day. Downie’s claim here suggests that we should expect Sally to *act* differently than Alex in light of her hope—perhaps staying up late or slacking on homework—and that she would feel pleased about this in a way that Alex, who is more reserved about the prospect, would not. Day also endorses this complication, and adds that hopes, like dispositions, admit of degrees: for, it is not that Sally either entirely expects a snow day, while Alex clearly does not; rather, it is more precise to say that Sally and Alex are on a spectrum of expectation, wherein significant differences in degree are labelled according to benchmarks associated with different degrees—for example, “hope,” “neutral consideration of a possibility,” and “despair.” Both thinkers, however, bracket this concern as irrelevant to their own analysis of hope, claiming that its dispositional features belong to a separate analysis of what it means to be *hopeful* that something will occur, rather than to their proposed analysis, which applies to “hope that.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, they allow that analyses of hopeful disposition, or the *way* people hope, may be interesting for some purposes, but not strictly required as parts of analyses of an individual’s hope *for* or hope *that* a specific outcome will be realized.

Bracketing this aspect of hope, however, raises some important questions about the nature of hope: for example, imagine Sally and Alex both desire a snow day and, having the

exact same evidence, assign it the same probability. How are we to explain Sally's being hopeful *for* the snow day without considering that she is, in some way, *disposed* to hope in a way that Alex is not? Put another way, it remains to be seen how different agents perceive the same circumstances as an occasion for hope, or just another day. Answering this question involves going beyond the Standard Account's criteria, to investigate the *way* Alex and Sally experience their respective desires for and estimations concerning a snow day. We may even need to delve into the particularities that are Sally and Alex *themselves*.

While developing a detailed account of a hopeful disposition may turn out to be outside the scope of both Day and Downie's projects, their bracketing of the above dimensions of hope leaves room for more to be said. Insofar as their accounts exclude the above complexities, they offer a partial picture of hope. Developing a more comprehensive account of the phenomenon will, I shall argue, involve delving into the nuances of the agent's experience, including agents' willingness to act on their hope, the justification for hope, and the nature of the relevant desires. I aim to show that neglecting to investigate the agent's individual experience of hope may exacerbate confusion among philosophers trying to expand upon the Standard Account. My intent in taking up these complexities is not to criticize the Standard Account for failing to address them, rather, I take them to indicate which aspects of hope theory merit further development. Though the majority of my work throughout the paper is intended to be complementary to the Standard Account, I undertake some critical work in later sections, where I consider some counterexamples that may pose difficulties for the Standard Account in the absence of other complementary work bolstering the theory.

The next section, however, asks what the mutual concerns of Day and Downie tell us about correcting or supplementing the Standard Account, and what can we learn about hope from

delving into these complications. I begin to answer these questions by considering some recent attempts by philosophers to expand upon and even subvert the Standard Account.

### III. Philosophical Attempts to Bridge the Gap

Arguing that the desiderative and estimative criteria for hope (i.e. “A wishes [desires] in some degree that P” and “A thinks that P is in some degree probable”) are too reductive,<sup>5</sup> and that the Standard Account of hope overlooks the *way* a person hopes, several philosophers have recently focused on expanding the Standard Account to better incorporate these considerations within hope theory. Here I will briefly consider the attempts of three philosophers.

In his 1999 paper “The Value of Hope,” Luc Bovens argued that “hoping is just having the proper belief and desire in conjunction with being engaged to some degree in *mental imaging* [... where ‘mental imaging’ signifies] the devotion of mental energy to what it would be like if some projected state of the world were to materialize” (Bovens 1999, 674). In a clear attempt to expand upon the desiderative criterion, he notes that the conjunction of the belief in an event’s possibility, combined with a desire that it obtain, is not sufficient to merit a hope (674). Although I both see it as possible *and* desirable that I might find twenty dollars on the street, for example, it is not clear that I’ve *hoped* for this to happen unless I’ve spent more than a passing moment thinking about the possibility and its desirability. There are many kinds of things which we would both agree are possible and desirable but would hesitate to label “hopes.” In this way, Bovens uncovers what he believes to be a third necessary criterion for hope—namely, what I will call the *mental imaging criterion*, the agent’s mental engagement with the possibility of their hope.

Similarly, in Philip Pettit’s 2004 work, “Hope and its Place in Mind,” he adds that a hope worth the name or a “substantial hope” means “...invest[ing a] scenario with a level of

confidence that may exceed the confidence of [one's] actual belief in the prospect and with a degree of stability that will certainly exceed the stability of [one's] actual belief" (Pettit 2004, 159). Consider a student completing a lengthy PhD application despite having an only slightly above-average GPA, and despite their knowledge that the program admits only two percent of applicants. Beyond desiring admission to the program and believing admission possible, the student displays a hope worth the name when they continue to plan for and apply to the program, even when their belief in the possibility of acceptance has waned or died.

Comparing hoping to planning or precaution, Pettit says hoping means putting whatever beliefs one may have about a hope's unlikelihood aside, in order to "organize [one's] responses and [one's] efforts around the assumption that the prospect is firmly on the horizon" (Pettit 2004, 159), much like the PhD application student completes in the above example. In other words, for Pettit, one's desiring a hoped-for prospect properly constitutes a hope when the hoper is willing to behave *as if* they were much more likely than not to attain what they hope for—I will call this Pettit's *acting-as-if* criterion. Unlike Bovens, however, Pettit does not reject the Standard Account as insufficient for identifying hope; rather, his account complements it by investigating hopeful behaviours, the inclusion of which, over and above those desires and beliefs about a prospect, enable the Standard Account to distinguish between what Pettit calls *substantial cases of hope*, and more trivial cases that qualify as hopes in a weaker sense.

In his 2009 work, "The Nature of Hope," Ariel Meirav takes further issue with the Standard Account, as well as Bovens' approach to amending it. Firstly, Meirav points out its failure to distinguish between the different *kinds* of probabilities that may be involved in hope: "*epistemic* probability (a measure of the strength of the available evidence for a proposition), *physical* probability (a measure of the tendency of the world to develop in such a way as to make

the proposition true), and *subjective* probability (a measure of the strength of one's belief [...])” (Meirav 2009, 219–220). Meirav asserts that the failure to distinguish between these probabilities creates ambiguity in the Standard Account; in turn, the Standard Account struggles to distinguish substantial cases of hope, such as the hope to be saved from great peril, from more trivial hopes, such as having a snow day away from work (Meirav 2009, 220). Meirav then suggests Bovens' account is also victim to this ambiguity, and challenges his counterexamples, which are analogous to the above case of the twenty-dollar bill. According to Meirav, proponents of the Standard Account could simply agree that a person is indeed not hoping for something before they have given some significant thought to the prospect.

Meirav then goes farther, making it clear that his problems with the Standard Account go beyond this charge of ambiguity or incompleteness, stating that the Standard Account is *false* because it rests on a fundamentally mistaken idea, namely that: “one's hope for a prospect  $p$  supervenes on the particulars of one's desire for and assignment of probability to  $p$  (for this only implies that if one does hope for  $p$ , then one's particular intensity of desire for  $p$ , in combination with the particular probability one assigns to  $p$ , jointly constitute a sufficient condition for hoping for  $p$ )” (Meirav 2009, 221). What Meirav is thus trying to emphasize is that a desire (however intense) and a probability assignment between certainty and impossibility is not always enough to entail hope. Meirav believes that the Standard Accounts' reliance on the (mistaken) idea that probability assignment and desire are sufficient for hope leaves it unable to distinguish hope from despair, because “according to the Standard Account, we despair of what we want simply because we think it is not sufficiently likely” (Meirav 2009, 219). Consider one of Meirav's counter-examples<sup>6</sup>: suppose he, Meirav, purchases a lottery ticket for ten dollars, for the chance of winning one million dollars. Upon returning home, he is very enthusiastic about



having purchased the ticket, and his wife is indifferent to this exact same prospect, namely, winning the lottery. In this case, they both know the exact odds of winning (1/100,000), which accounts for their assigning the prospect of winning the same *epistemic* probability (Meirav 2009, 224). He then claims that their difference in enthusiasm need not reflect any different degree of *subjective* probability. To support this claim, he draws on a decision-theoretic approach:

The subjective probability that A assigns to proposition p is proportional to the monetary value that A places on the following offer: receive sum S if p, and receive nothing if it is not the case that p. According to this criterion, the assumption that both my wife and I assign a subjective probability of 1/100,000 to the prospect of winning corresponds to the assumption that both of us place a monetary value of \$10 on the following offer: receive \$1,000,000 if the ticket wins, and receive nothing if it does not. Now, suppose our subjective probability assignments are as I have just said, and that I paid \$10 for the ticket. There seems to be nothing odd about my wife's indifference. After all, I paid \$10 for something that in her view is worth exactly that. [...] What is there to be enthusiastic about? (Meirav 2009, 224-225)<sup>7</sup>

According to Meirav, the above example is evidence that relevant probability assignments and desires are not always sufficient for distinguishing hope from despair. This means that one's enthusiasm (taken to be indicative of hope) for a prospect may be constitutively influenced by more than just desires and probability assignments. If it is indeed possible for one party to despair of a prospect while the other hopes for it, despite identical subjective probability assignments and relevant desires, then perhaps equipping the Standard Account for dealing with such cases involves referencing the hoper's relationship to other, *external* factors. Thus, Meirav

begins to develop his own amendment to the Standard Account, the *external factor account* (Meirav 2009, 227), by qualifying the kind of desire involved in hope in two ways. First, he notes that hoping for something seems to imply that it is beyond our causal or epistemic powers in some way—it seems entirely wrong to say that one “hopes” for a prospect which could easily be accessed or attained without any resistance whatsoever (Meirav 2009, 229)—for example, “I hope to make a sandwich for lunch” or “I hope to visit my next-door neighbour.” Second, he notes that desires involved in hope are “resignative,” not in the sense that one resigns oneself to or despairs over the fulfillment of one’s hopes, but only to one’s lack of [total] control over its fulfillment (Meirav 2009, 229).

For Meirav, these qualifications point to the importance of external factors for the nature of hope, because seeing a prospect as beyond the scope of one’s control necessarily involves “some conception of an *external factor* [...] distinct from both self and prospect, as possessing the power to determine causally whether or not the desired prospect will obtain” (Meirav 2009, 230). Thus, the external factor account includes one’s attitude toward such factors as necessary for distinguishing hope from despair in some cases<sup>8</sup>: “...if one views [whatever external factors may be relevant to the actualization of their hope] as good, then one hopes for the prospect. If one views [them] as not good, then one despairs of it” (Meirav 2009, 230). For example, if I want to find a certain elusive manuscript in a library, according to Meirav I will *hope* to find it if I perceive the librarians as knowledgeable and helpful persons, instead of lazy and unfriendly people who are difficult to deal with. In the case that I see external factors—such as librarians—as resources rather than obstacles to the achievement of the hoped-for manuscript, my limited agency (my inability to find the manuscript on my own) would signal an occasion for hope rather than despair. Put another way, this distinction is the difference between thinking, “My own

research abilities have been tapped out, but surely I'll be able to find it with the help of these librarians!" and, "Those librarians never help anyone without a fight, if I have to depend on them, I'll never find the manuscript!"

The above elaborations on the Standard Account attempt to fill theoretical gaps and can be used to help gain further clarity about hope. Among those attempting to expand upon or challenge the Standard Account<sup>9</sup> there is, for example, a noticeable emphasis on *the individual's experience of hope*. This is evidenced by the fact that Bovens, Meirav, and Pettit turn their attention to the *way* hopers hope by considering examples of hopeful experiences, shedding further light on *how* the desiderative and estimative criteria proposed by Downie and Day bear on the effectiveness of the Standard Account in identifying cases of hope. Bovens looks to experiences of hope to find that *mental imaging* is a characteristic form of investment that is part of desiring what one hopes for; Meirav finds that hopes, where non-trivial and not highly probable, can be distinguished by a positive perception of external factors indicating a hoper's trust in the possibility of their desired outcome; and Pettit suggests that behaviours resembling those associated with planning or precaution are also good indicators of hope. Earlier, we saw that Day and Downie's account brackets investigation into agents' experiences, treating desire and estimation as abstract concepts whose presence is sufficient for hope, regardless of how this might change from hoper to hoper. Here, we begin to notice Bovens, Pettit, and Meirav move toward incorporating more specific attributes of hopeful experience into their accounts, the inclusion of which more directly implies the need for knowledge of the individual hoper in question. We need to know relatively little or nothing about a hoper *herself* in order for their experience to count as a "hope" under the standard account—it's enough if we know that the hoper both desires something and believes it to be neither certain nor impossible. Desire and

probability assignment in this sense can easily be impersonally conceived, and the corresponding experience labelled “hope” via the Standard Account’s minimum necessary and sufficient conditions. If you and I both desire the presence of our mutual friend at a party and deem the friend’s presence to be neither impossible nor certain, under the Standard Account, we understand that both you and I hope that our friend will attend; no further investigation is necessary. Conversely, Meirav, Bovens, and Pettit seem to be moving away from this relative neglect of the hoper, by arguing that features of the *way* or *extent* to which a hoper hopes is indeed relevant, and (especially in Meirav’s case) necessary if we are to identify hope and distinguish it from other phenomena.

But within this small selection of views that elaborate on the Standard Account, there is already an obvious lack of consensus about which experiences should count as relevant ingredients for hope in difficult cases—that is, those in which a real hope cannot be easily identified by the Standard Account alone. Our new obstacle in the search for a robust account of hope is a lack of clarity about what kinds of experiences are key to a complete picture of hope. Thus, the challenge here is to determine which kinds of experiences ought to be included in a more comprehensive and agent-focused account of hope. Given that attention to agents’ experiences of hope have only recently become a relevant consideration in the philosophical literature, the following section turns to positive psychology for help, as researchers in this field have indeed dwelt on agents’ experiences in their hope research.

### **III. A New Approach to the Experience: Thoughts, Origins, and the Need for an Inclusive Account of Hope**

#### *i. Hopeful Thoughts*

In the *The Rules of Hope*, the psychologists Averill, Catlin, and Chon seek “implicit theories that people use when reasoning about hope in everyday affairs” (Averill, Catlin, and Chon 1990, 10) in an attempt to find intelligible patterns within subjects’ experiences of hope. They hypothesized that an analysis of subjects’ self-reported, hope-related behaviours and thoughts would shed light on the nature of the phenomenon. With this in mind, Averill et al. conducted four studies that used self-reporting methods to identify patterns of beliefs and behaviours within individuals’ hopeful experiences. Although Averill et al. were unable to associate hope with specific responses that applied in every case, their study helped them discern four “proto-rules” or guidelines for hope: (1) “prudential rules” dictate that “when the probability of attainment [of a goal] is too low, hope is inappropriate” (Averill et al. 1990, 33); (2) “moralistic rules” suggest that “the object of hope is circumscribed not only by what is prudent or reasonable, but also by what is socially acceptable, i.e. by moral values” (Averill et al. 1990, 33); (3) “priority rules” separate hopes from more trivial wants and desires by aligning them with “a person’s vital interests”(Averill et al. 1990, 33); and (4) “action rules” state that “people who hope would be willing to take appropriate action to achieve their goals, if action is possible” (Averill et al. 1990, 34).<sup>10</sup> Averill et al.’s research is worth highlighting because it suggests individuals’ experiences can inform theories of hope. Specifically, they brought attention to what hopeful agents characteristically *do*, and how this hopeful behaviour is influenced by evaluative, self-referential thinking. For example, when Averill asked one hundred and fifty college students to describe something they hoped for, versus something they desired but did *not* hope for, responses were sorted into groups according to subjects’ perceived personal control versus situational control over the outcome. The most common response chosen among seven possible actions to be taken in response to one’s hope “was to ‘work harder’: specifically, 88.5% of the

subjects who believed they had a high degree of personal control<sup>11</sup> over the outcome reported “working ‘somewhat’ or ‘very much’ harder because of their hope; 63.2% of the subjects in the situation-control group did so” (Averill et al. 1990, 25). Averill et al. suggest that this outcome implies a connection between what a person does when they experience hope (e.g. “work harder”) and what a person believes they can do in a situation (corresponding to their perceived level of control).<sup>12</sup>

Psychologist C. R. Snyder’s “Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind”<sup>13</sup> further develops on this insight about the importance of self-referential thoughts for hope, and his theory remains a prevailing framework in contemporary research. According to Snyder, hope is “a specific way of thinking about oneself” (Snyder 2002, 25), specifically, the perception of oneself as capable of finding and following through with ways to achieve personal goals. This renders hope as “the sum of the mental willpower and waypower that you have for your goals” (Snyder 2002, 5). *Goals* are defined as “objects, experiences, or outcomes that we imagine and desire in our minds”; *willpower* is defined as “a reservoir of determination and commitment that we can call on to help move us in the direction of the goal to which we are attending at any given moment” (Snyder 2002, 6), and *waypower* is a mental capacity we can call on to find one or more effective ways to reach our goals [...or] *the perception* that one can engage in planful thought...” (Snyder 2002, 8).

While contemporary philosophers have also moved toward a focus on the way agents experience hope, Snyder’s account develops two factors that are somewhat neglected in philosophical accounts. The first of these is the *kind of thoughts* characteristic of hope. For example, Snyder observes that one’s willpower “reflects [one’s] thoughts about initiating and sustaining movement toward desired goals” (Snyder 2002, 7), and can be manifested in thoughts

such as “I can, I’ll try, I’m ready to do this, and I’ve got what it takes” (Snyder 2002, 6), whereas waypower is manifested in thoughts such as “‘If [I] can’t do it one way, [I’ll] do it another way!’” (Snyder 2002, 7). The kinds of thoughts linked to hopeful experiences are overwhelmingly cast as self-appraisals regarding one’s ability to achieve one’s goals.<sup>14</sup> According to Snyder, this is in part due to a fortifying effect stemming from the tacit knowledge that “...even during stressful times when we run into blockages on the way to our goals, we have been able to generate the mental efforts to overcome them” (Snyder 2002, 7). In other words, positive self-appraisals strengthen us to face challenges, because they reflect our own knowledge or confidence that we are, in fact, capable of overcoming them.

In a later article, Snyder explains that, during interviews for his initial hope research, participants’ general self-appraisals about their abilities to achieve goals were *superseded* by thoughts about their specific goals (Snyder 2002, 250). This means that a hope, for Snyder, involves a detailed look at the *way* one thinks about oneself in relation to that outcome and its pursuit. Suppose, for example, I view a good grade on an algebra test as a desirable and possible outcome. However, if hope is, in part, a function of my self-referential thoughts, and I think myself liable to err in mathematics or unworthy of success, my self-referential thoughts may indicate a diminished or absent hope for an A+.<sup>15</sup> Further, these thoughts may even affect whether I see a math test as an occasion for hope at all. A fuller investigation into hope, then, should pay close attention to its self-referential dimensions of hope revealed in the thoughts of hopers, and regard these as important to the clarification of the phenomenon of hope. Indeed, one aspect of the hoper’s experience begins to clarify here: there seems to be a connection between “enduring, self-referential thoughts about [one’s] capacities to [find the routes to and motivation

for one's] goals" (Snyder 2002, 250) and whether (and to what degree) someone's relevant desires and possibility assignments qualify as hopes.

So far, we have seen that Snyder thinks hope involves particular thoughts about oneself as an effective agent, one who is able to bring about a desired goal, even when difficulties arise—but what about cases in which one's agency is limited? Imagine you find an injured dog on the road and rush it to the vet as fast as you can, in the hopes of sparing its life. Clearly, thoughts such as "I'll be able to make it to the vet in time!" or "It's worth seeing what I can do, I've helped in emergencies before!" could strengthen you to the task of rescuing the dog and fuel your hope of saving it. However, once the dog has been delivered into veterinary care, you may continue to hope for its recovery even though those hopeful thoughts about getting to the vet and helping initially are no longer applicable and so seemingly no longer contributing to your hopeful state. Can such thoughts shed light on hope, even when hopes outlast them?

Snyder thinks so; he posits a link between the hoper's self-evaluative thoughts and a more general sense she has of herself as a capable, effective agent. Snyder posits that successful goal pursuits breed further successful pursuits, due to the reinforcing character of the requisite positive emotions.<sup>16</sup> When people achieve their goals, they feel good about themselves, which reinforces the sense of self as effective causal instigator, in turn causing them to attempt more pursuits and reinforcing the cycle—a self-reinforcing feedback loop.<sup>17,18</sup> In short, those whose goals are met (or whose hopes are attained) typically experience positive emotions, and these emotions in turn strengthen one's sense of self as capable, as well as strengthening the perception that one's goals are worthwhile (Snyder 1994, 52–53). Those feelings and perceptions help fuel further hope and attainment of goals.



This feedback loop could potentially explain how one's self-evaluative thoughts are linked to one's ability to hope even as their agency becomes limited. Return to the case of the injured dog. The person who sees herself as an effective agent may be heartened by their previous experiences expending efforts in difficult situations (such as rushing the dog to the hospital). Having experienced payoffs in times of difficulty, they may be more inclined to believe that their efforts are worthwhile—or in this case, to hope that the dog will be saved. Conversely, the person who doubts the effectiveness of their agency may be less likely to try and succeed in the face of challenging situations, as manifested in thoughts such as: “That poor dog is hurt, but I’ll never be able to make it to the vet on time!” or “The dog’s injury is too serious, there’s nothing I can do!” If a person thinks of herself as an ineffective agent, a consequential reticence to *try* to affect outcomes in such challenging situations may contribute to a feedback loop in which this person experiences less payoff for their actions and less reinforcement of their hopes as worthwhile.<sup>19</sup>

If there is in fact a link between a hoppers’ self-evaluative thoughts and their tendency to hope, then more fine-grained self-referential and evaluative thoughts than those picked out by the Standard Account can be seen as typical ingredients of hope. However, more needs to be said to clarify the role this kind of thinking about agency plays in hope. For example, if these kinds of thoughts fuel a self-sustaining cycle that promotes hopeful thinking, what makes some people more inclined to this way of thinking? This brings us to the second way in which Snyder’s approach to agents’ experience of hope differs from other accounts. Namely, Snyder considers the *origins* of hopeful thoughts and their *development* (Snyder 1994, 7).

ii. *Origins and Development of Hopeful Thinking*

Beyond merely positing that willpower- and waypower-thoughts are typical of hope, Snyder believes that understanding the kinds of developmental experiences that *contribute* to and shape these thoughts is significant for understanding what hope is. Drawing on research in developmental psychology, Snyder notes that as infants begin to make connections or associations they are acquiring “anchors for comprehending the chronology of happenings”<sup>20</sup> (Snyder 1994, 79), which help them make sense of and navigate their reality in a meaningful way. An infant’s recognition of herself as the originator or instigator of events, combined with her ability to establish causal linkages, form the building blocks of goal-oriented or “hopeful” thinking (Snyder 1994, 83)—the self-referential waypower- and willpower-thoughts discussed above.

Building on Bowlby’s attachment theory,<sup>21</sup> Snyder hypothesizes that hope is largely influenced by primary caregivers, because they demonstrate and coach children about causal, goal-oriented thinking, and act as the primary allies for children in achieving their goals, even if these are something as simple as receiving a snack or a toy (Snyder 1994, 84).<sup>22</sup> Though it is no surprise that children become upset when they experience barriers, a 1975 study by Cornelius F. M. van Lieshout found that toddlers reacted differently to the obstruction of a desired toy when their mothers were present. Instead of the tantrums that ensued in their mothers’ absence, the toddlers “made gestures that were apparently directed at getting the mother to help them remove the barrier to the toy” (van Lieshout, as referenced in Snyder 1994, 84). This study suggests children sometimes practice productively incorporating frustration plus moving forward without relinquishing the goal altogether.<sup>23</sup> Further barrier-related studies suggest that delays in gratification and barriers to children’s goals may be key in fostering hope, insofar as the

“successful handling of difficult transactions begets children empowered to find solutions to future problems” (Snyder 1994, 86),<sup>24</sup> developing their self-perceived effective agency.

Research in attachment theory also serves as a basis for Snyder’s hypothesis that early experiences are significant for the development of hopeful thinking. Following Bowlby, Snyder suggests that when the infant is securely attached to their caregiver(s), the development of hope is facilitated in the child (Snyder 1994, 87)<sup>25</sup> This claim is premised on the idea that when caregivers are attentive and responsive to a child’s needs, the child internalizes this framework as a way of understanding the larger world, which, according to the caregiver’s consistency and attentiveness, can be seen as meaningful and safe or as confusing and threatening.<sup>26,27</sup> A responsive and consistently attentive caregiver serves as a model for effective goal-related behaviours, and their interactive encouragement fosters a grasp of causal linkages that not only allow the child to come to see the availability of others as allies in goal pursuits, but help them learn to “trust in the reliability of self-initiated cause-and-effect-relationships” (Shorey et al. 2002).

This raises the idea that the encouragement children receive in secure parental relationships are foundational to hope’s waypower- and willpower-thinking, because such relationships create a safe and supportive environment in which a child can come to see herself as someone who can successfully engage in hopeful, goal-oriented thoughts and behaviours.<sup>28</sup> When the caregiver engages with the child’s goal pursuits, their coaching and support can increase the chances of success and reduce the pain of failure, which in turn renders engagement with one’s goals a more attractive prospect, likely to kickstart a self-reinforcing cycle. Snyder offers the illustrative example of a children’s Easter egg hunt he witnessed: while some caregivers offered little help with their child’s goal, urging them to “hurry up” or becoming

exasperated and finding the eggs *for* the child, others offered encouragement, reassuring their child that they were “doing great,” giving them hints about the eggs’ locations, and letting them know it was okay to ask for help if needed (Snyder 1994, 86-7). It is not difficult to tell which children are being encouraged to develop hopeful thinking. A child may struggle to perceive herself as capable, if their caregivers frequently treat them in ways that suggest they are not.

This attention to attachment and parenting in children’s earliest experiences suggests that one’s particular developmental history is relevant to understanding how one hopes, by showing that this history, especially in terms of interactions with caregivers, shapes the agentic thought that is shown to be closely linked to hope. This uncovers some relevant factors in hope that go overlooked if hope is studied only in terms of an abstract goal, desire, and probability assessment. It is becoming clearer that hope should additionally be thought of as a way of engaging with the world as a place that is responsive, makes sense, and is full of opportunities. In particular, Snyder’s developmental focus clarifies that hope is something that has roots in our most basic forms of engagement with the world—our perceptions—and the foundations of hope may be present even before desires can be articulated and probabilities consciously assessed.

### *iii. Thoughts and Origins: Combined for an Inclusive Account of Hope*

In this section, I draw out and summarize two agent-specific factors emerging from the above discussion of psychological work, which I combine with the standard account of hope to form my own *inclusive account* of hope.

The first factor is that hope involves a *perception of oneself* as someone who can successfully pursue and achieve meaningful goals. I will call this the *self-styled agent factor* (SAF). The SAF is a critical component of hope, as hope involves the perception of oneself as capable of finding and following through with ways to achieve personal goals. A key insight

gained from thinking about this factor is that a fuller theory of hope should account for the agent's *perception* of herself in relation to what is hoped for; for, how one perceives themselves in relation to an outcome, as we have seen, *goes beyond* desire and probability, to the core of one's self-evaluation.

The second factor is hope's basis in the earliest stages of development, and its coextensive development with agency. I will call this the *co-development factor* (CDF). The most significant insight associated with this factor is the idea that hopeful behaviours and thinking begin before developed, articulable hopes are ever apparent. If the earliest stages of our development are the building blocks for hope, then a theory of hope may benefit from considering what this suggests about the nature of hope. I have previously submitted that this recommends viewing hope as a way of being in the world,<sup>29</sup> a way of engaging with the world and being engaged *by* it. Put another way, the CDF suggests that, beyond developing coextensively with agency, hope is in part premised on the learned anticipation of opportunities rather than threats, and on trust instead of suspicion.

Insights provided by the CDF and SAF are particularly relevant for developing hope theory because they help explicate the ways one's environment is always already shaped by the hoper's perceptions, which are in turn shaped by factors including their sense of trust or mistrust of the world, responsiveness to the world, and their active engagement with it. A focus on these two factors is central to my proposed Inclusive Account of hope, since the SAF and CDF represent two agent-relative factors that contextualize the desires and probability assessments the Standard Account already uses to identify hope. Specifically, the proponent of the Inclusive Account can look to a person's self-perceived agency (accessed through the kinds of thoughts discussed above), and a person's developmental history (accessed through information about

attachment and childhood experiences), as a way of expanding the Standard Account's capabilities: while the Standard Account seems successful in its aim of determining *that* a person hopes, several philosophers, including Downie and Day themselves, have said that this bare-bones approach leaves much more to be said. For example, we cannot necessarily infer the *degree* of hope from the intensity of a desire or the size of a probability assessment, especially when these criteria are divorced from the individual experiencing them. I may assign my winning a 50/50 draw a probability of 0.6 and think it very desirable, yet through years of disappointment and poor luck, after some consideration, I may be barely hopeful, restraining myself from fantasizing about the prospect, where another may be extremely hopeful in comparison to myself. Bovens and Pettit tried to address this sort of issue by adding a mental engagement, but it is unclear what mental engagement will tell us about a hope without further context about a person's hopeful tendencies, which may be provided by incorporating SAF and CDF insights into Standard Account analysis.

In this way, the Inclusive Account builds on the Standard Account by taking desire and a non-zero, non-unity probability assessment as jointly necessary and sufficient for hope, while also drawing on the relevance of SAF and CDF factors, allowing further analysis by relying on agent-relative criteria that contextualize the desires and probability assessments as belonging to a particular hoper. In practice, the Inclusive Account would thus involve identifying a probability assignment and desire as per the Standard Account, while also making use of information about a hoper's self-perceived agency and developmental histories where further analysis can tell us about the nature of one's hope, such as the degree or intensity.

While Bovens and Pettit argued that the Standard Account overlooks a hoping agent's mental engagement with a hoped-for prospect, Meirav argued we should add more to the

Standard Account. In the final section of this paper I will show how these CDF and SAF insights can help us further develop the attempts by Bovens, Pettit, and Meirav to focus on the *way* in which a particular agent hopes, and how an inclusive account of hope would help us avoid a difficulty encountered by Meirav. With the help of Bekka Williams, I argue that Meirav's challenge results from an abstract conception of the agent, a tendency which shares in the Standard Account's bracketing of agent-relative factors. I will then use SAF and CDF insights to propose an alternative to Meirav's view, one that less abstractly adds to the Standard Account's necessary conditions.<sup>30</sup>

#### **IV. Meirav's External Factor Account: A Relic of the Standard Account's Incompleteness?**

Going beyond Bovens' and Pettit's criticisms of the Standard Account, Meirav argues that that account rests on the flawed idea that hope *supervenes* on the particulars of a desire-probability assignment combination, in relation to some prospect, *p* (Meirav 2009, 221). It is this exclusive focus, he claims, that leaves the Standard Account unable to distinguish hope from despair in some cases. For Meirav, since the relevant information concerning the agent's desires, probability assessment, and the epistemic probability of the prospect are already referenced in such accounts, he believes that whatever is missing from them must be something totally "other" from self (the hoper) and the prospect (the hoped-for). Meirav's external factor account thus offers to explain hope in terms of an attitude with respect to that which is out of one's control. We saw, in the case of the lottery ticket, that this does not literally mean that Meirav perceives that the odds are better than his wife perceives them to be; rather, according to Meirav his sense of enthusiasm is grounded in the perception of an external factor as favourable regarding this prospect. This factor can perhaps be understood as a perception of "the universe" or of "luck."

Meirav's External Factor approach implies that whatever could help the Standard Account distinguish hope from despair could not be the agent herself. Indeed, Meirav's turn to what is other or external to the hoper suggests that he thinks that whatever agent-specific factors are relevant for distinguishing hope from despair have already been exhausted: where desire and probability assessments are known, according to Meirav, it seems that the hope theorist must turn to what is entirely other for clues that distinguish an instance of hope from despair.

I disagree. What Meirav seems to miss is that part of what is relevant about this "external" factor is indeed the agent's *attitude* toward the factor. For example, in the case of the lottery ticket, much of what makes Meirav's attitude toward luck useful in explaining his enthusiasm is *his own perception* of external factor *x* as favouring his winning. Glossing this in terms of something *entirely other* misses the potential importance of the way in which this perception is, at least in part, a product of one's way of interacting with the world.

Another reprise of the lottery ticket example may clarify this point. Meirav aims to show that we are unable to account for the differences between his wife's enthusiasm and his own, in order to justify the turn to an external factor as a necessary move to explain the discrepancy. I suggest, however, that at least part of the force of this example relies on our lack of knowledge about Meirav and his wife themselves, and their respective ways of seeing or interacting with the world. Our ignorance about them as hopers helps to rule out the possibility of our discovering relevant internal or agent-relative factors – such as past experiences or tendencies affecting hope – that could be used to account for the differences in hope.

This point is further clarified by considering an analogous case involving oneself and a close friend or loved one. It seems reasonable to look to our friend's ways of thinking or facts about their developmental history as clues helping to explain a discrepancy in hope. My partner



Mike, for example, is excited about looking for a new apartment. We both have the same data about what is available on the market, and therefore may assign the possibility of finding a suitable home to have an identical epistemological probability. Yet Mike appears hopeful at this prospect, while I despair. Upon noticing this discrepancy, I do not, as Meirav might suggest, find myself at a loss to explain my different attitude. Rather, I note that when Mike is asked about his hopeful confidence, he simply states that “we’ll be able to find something if we look hard enough” and that “we’ll be able to make any place homey.” This kind of thinking is consistent with the fact that I know Mike to be, in general, more easily excited at this kind of prospect. It is also consistent with what I know about Mike’s past experiences: Mike moved several times as a child, occasions which he describes as having “always worked out okay”, and instances about which his mother, in particular “did not seem to be bothered or worried,” whereas I never moved, and my parents never expressed a desire to do so.

The point here is not to defend a post-hoc connection between certain types of experiences and instances of hope. My aim is to point out that Mike’s thoughts and experiences concerning the prospect are potentially relevant behavioural measures I could appeal to in order to explain his enthusiastic behaviour, especially when comparing it to my own. In fact, my ability to appeal to this information leaves me not at all bewildered by Mike’s enthusiasm. If this kind of information has explanatory force in other such scenarios, then perhaps Meirav’s lottery ticket example need not necessarily arouse the kind of confusion used to justify the external factor account.

Although a simplified version of the Standard Account may be incapable of offering an explanation of a lottery ticket-type scenario, it seems strange that Meirav *himself* would, in practice, neglect to appeal to his wife’s thoughts or experiences when parsing out their different

levels of enthusiasm. This is not to say that one's attitudes toward external factors are irrelevant for hope—indeed, it seems that Mike could rightly be said to hold a relatively optimistic view of the housing market, and Meirav's wife may conceive unfavourably of luck. However, Meirav's account seems to disproportionately focus on locating and describing relevant external factors, while ruling out the relevance of the agent's thoughts and experiences for determining whether and to what degree one hopes. It thus seems that Meirav has proposed a counterexample to the Standard Account that does not accurately reflect how we reason about hope in our own lives.

Bekka Williams has raised similar difficulties with Meirav's account in her 2012 paper "The Agent-Relative Probability Threshold of Hope." Like Meirav, Williams considers an account to be congruous with the Standard Account if it takes the desiderative and estimative criteria as jointly sufficient for hope. As we saw earlier, regardless of the probability threshold, Meirav thinks that the Standard Account is left with the problematic possibility that one who desires an outcome and assigns it a non-unity probability that exceeds the threshold probability for hope, could nonetheless also be classified as despairing of  $p$  (Williams 2012, 182), such as Meirav and his wife in the lottery ticket example. Williams, however, points out that such accounts leave room for massive variation concerning which probabilities count toward hope (Williams 2012, 181). Given this, she says, the proponent of the Standard Account could simply choose a single, standard threshold for distinguishing hope from despair to prevent overlap, thereby avoiding this problem (Williams 2012, 183). This means that in order for Meirav's charge against the Standard Account to stand, it will need to be shown that the Standard Account does in fact involve instances of overlapping probability thresholds—a point he tries to substantiate with some examples, including our already discussed lottery ticket example (Meirav 2009, 183). Williams counters, stating that it is not evident that Meirav's wife

does not also hope to win the lottery, because Meirav has conflated *being hopeful* regarding *p* with *hoping that p* (Williams 2012, 183). What Williams means is that Meirav's wife's lack of enthusiasm or optimism about the prospect need not necessarily amount to an absence of hope. To demonstrate her point, Williams offers the example of someone who hopes *that* she be offered a job, despite a lack of enthusiasm or optimism about her prospects (Williams 2012, 184). Although this may not be an exemplary case of a *reasonable* hope (depending on the degree of enthusiasm and strength of the hope), Williams points out that it does still count as a "hope-that," unless we are altogether ready to deem it contradictory or incoherent (Williams 2012, 184). Thus, she concludes that the lottery ticket example is not a serious challenge to the Standard Account: that Meirav's wife is not acting *hopeful* (enthusiastic) about the prospect that they will win the lottery leaves it open that she hopes *that* they win.

Conversely, Williams suggests that another of Meirav's examples from "The Nature of Hope" does more work for his argument. That example involves Andy and Red, two characters sentenced to life in prison for murder in the 1994 film *The Shawshank Redemption*:

[Andy and Red] are in many ways similar. They are equally resourceful, they understand equally well the workings of the prison and the ways of the prisoners and guards inhabiting it, and they have an equal grasp of the very small chances of escaping. At the same time, neither of them has lost the desire to be free again [...] And yet, Andy lives in the hope of escaping, whereas Red despairs of this. Indeed, Red thinks that hope should be resisted, suppressed, for hoping in this virtually hopeless situation would threaten his sanity. It seems reasonable to say that the film suggests that Andy hopes for freedom and Red does not, in spite of

their similar desire for freedom and their assignment of similar probability to attaining it. (Meirav 2009, 222-223)

This example is supposed to be another case in which the Standard Account is unable to distinguish between two agents who are identical with respect to the relevant desires and probability assessments, wherein one clearly despairs and the other hopes. Williams thinks this example more compelling than the lottery ticket example because it does not depend on the conflation of enthusiasm and hoping-that, and she therefore concludes that it would be unrealistic to say that Red hopes at all for freedom, given that he explicitly states that hoping is pointless on numerous occasions in the film (Williams 2012, 185). Despite this, she finds that the difficulty this example might pose for the Standard Account is not without its own weaknesses. When trying to make sense of how Andy and Red can differ in hope without varying in the Standard Account's criteria for hope, she reminds us that the Standard Account only requires that a hoper desires a prospect and (usually implicitly) assigns it a probability greater than zero and less than 1. She further notes that this "leaves a wide range from which to select the relevant probability threshold—which is most appropriately described as the degree of probability lower than which [the agent] simply finds continued consideration of the prospect to be pointless" (Williams 2012, 186). Williams then urges us to notice that this threshold need not be the *epistemic* probability that some prospect will obtain, but rather the probability below which the agent despairs of the prospect. If we are careful to make this distinction, then the problem with Andy and Red dissolves: if all the Standard Account requires for hope is a non-zero, non-unity probability assignment and a desire, this means that Andy and Red could both desire their escape and view and assign its epistemic probability an identical value, while having different thresholds for how improbable their escape would have to be to make its consideration pointless. It may be the case,

for example, that Red simply requires a probability assignment of 0.4 in order to view continued consideration of hope worthwhile, while Red may be content to hope with only a 0.1 probability assignment. Thinking in this way allows us to explain the difference in their hope by appealing to the possibility that Andy and Red simply have different probability thresholds designating the point at which hope turns to despair.

Herein lies Williams' most forceful objection to Meirav's case: she asserts that we have no reason to believe that whatever probability threshold separates despair from hope is the same for everyone (Williams 2012, 186). In other words, it makes sense that the degree of probability associated with hopelessness may vary for each person, a fact that Williams proposes can be explained by differences in character, and a possibility we saw in practice in my earlier example concerning my partner Mike and apartment hunting. Drawing on research concerning risk aversion, Williams states that two people may differ in assent to an identical risk, simply because "one finds the degree of danger unacceptable [while the other does not]" (Williams 2012, 187). If this is the case for risk aversion, it should not be surprising that a probability which justifies hope for one person may not justify hope for another. Indeed, had I directly conceded that the probability of our finding an apartment we like is 0.7, it is still entirely possible, given the ways in which Mike and I differ, that 0.7 may be more than enough to justify hope for him, and not enough for me.

## **V. Application of the Inclusive Account: Bringing the Agent Back into Hope**

Having now parsed out the proposed relative nature of hope-thresholds, it seems intuitive that each agent's hope threshold could vary according to their character, and it is surprising to see the implicit idea of a universal, fixed probability threshold drawn out of Meirav's argument. It is perhaps less surprising if we recall that the original proponents of the Standard Account

bracketed several agent-specific, dispositional concerns as outside of the scope of the project. In the following and final section, I will (i) explore the ways in which the absence of these bracketed concerns may have contributed to the implicit conception of a fixed probability threshold and (ii) suggest that the inclusive account may offer guidance about how to build relevant agent-relative factors into the Standard Account to avoid problems like Meirav's.

At the beginning of this paper, I traced out the original Standard Account as proposed by Downie and Day. As part of this, I pointed out some concerns regarding hope which they bracketed as beyond the scope of their intent to provide the minimum necessary and sufficient conditions for hope. Further, they noted that these concerns indicated areas where more could be said about hope. The first of these included Downie's mention of a "certain conceptual connection between 'hope to do' and 'intend to do'" (Downie 1963, 251), which was also echoed by Day's statement that "'A wishes that P' entails 'A is disposed to bring it about that P'" (Day 1991, 98).

Williams develops this point using her conception of an agent-relative probability threshold, saying that being "disposed to bring it about that P" is an example of a behavioural criterion that could be used to help determine an agent's individual probability threshold in a given situation. She notes that although determining an individual threshold may certainly be a messy or difficult business in some cases, it need not be problematic as long as we are able to define it in terms of the degree of probability that *that particular agent finds acceptable for hope*. It is difficult to say whether Downie or Day suspected that being disposed to act was connected to hope in this way. However, their above comments suggest that Downie and Day recognized that an agent's individual *character* was relevant in some way to their hope—namely that the agent's role in hope may not be reducible to a desire and a probability assignment. As Williams

proposes, we may begin to incorporate this concern into the Standard Account itself simply by explicitly acknowledging that the probability threshold is not fixed. Despite that fact that later philosophers such as Meirav were challenging the Standard Account, they were still responding to it—it is possible that Downie and Day’s bracketing of this concern set a precedent for understanding the particularities of hopeful agents as beyond the scope of what is to be taken into account in a theory of hope.

Secondly, Downie and Day expressed a similar concern that beliefs and hopes were perplexingly dissimilar. While we *can* say “A’s hope that P is reasonable although P is improbable” (Downie 1963, 101), the same is not true for beliefs. Again, the nature of this concern becomes much clearer if we assume probability thresholds are agent-relative. While there are certainly norms that apply to both the rationality of beliefs and the rationality of hope,<sup>31</sup> the threshold of certainty that justifies a belief may be differently policed, or in general need to be more fixed—regardless of whether it *actually* is fixed; this constraint may not be appropriate for thresholds for hope, on the other hand. It is likely that people differ with respect to the threshold of certainty at which they form a belief, just as Williams proposes they do with respect to their thresholds for hope. However, believing involves *assenting* that *p*, whereas hope involves *desiring* that *p* in accordance with a judgement that *p* is neither impossible nor certain. Desiring that *p* is not the same as assenting that *p* (or not *p*) insofar as our desires are not propositions capable of being true or false. Because there are methods of verifying, to varying degrees, the truth of certain propositions (e.g. the scientific method), we have a normative yardstick against which to measure the rationality of someone’s threshold of assent. Excluding special contexts involving religious and supernatural claims, where verifiable and public knowledge is concerned, it is key to upholding this knowledge that there be an acceptable point around which belief

formation thresholds ideally cluster. When shifting to desires that are not truth apt, it is more difficult to measure the hope's rationality, and thus more difficult to rule out any range of probabilities as definitely rational or irrational with respect to hope.

The third complication mentioned by both Day and Downie is that if hope implies a state of “comparative expectation” (Downie 1963, 250), then it entails the exhibition of behavioural patterns “accompanied by characteristic pleasurable feelings” (Downie 1963, 250). At the beginning of the paper, we saw that this kind of comment nods at the existence of a hopeful disposition, despite the fact that a full analysis of said hopeful disposition falls outside of the scope of the original Standard Account. If we now take Williams' proposal into consideration, it seems that Downie and Day, too, were broaching the importance of the agent-relative aspects of hope, while nonetheless leaving them aside for their more circumscribed aims in developing the Standard Account. Furthermore, the introduction of an agent-relative probability threshold shines further light on what may have been meant by a state of “comparative expectation,” since it gives context to and explains the differences in hope between agents, and perhaps even the differences in hope within one individual over time, in the case of a gradual character change.

Proponents of the original Standard Account did not offer answers but asked only question regarding these issues. Williams has made explicit the importance of the agent-relative probability threshold as a key factor connecting the above complications—complications which Day and Downie deemed important enough to mention, yet beyond the scope of their original accounts. By considering the way in which the agent-relative threshold illuminates each of the above concerns, I hope to have emphasized that William's work draws out a reflection on the agent-relative aspect of hope that *may have* already been present, albeit implicitly.



Indeed, both Pettit and Bovens attempt to further develop the above concerns in their own right, not discarding the Standard Account but continuing on the path to which those such as Downie and Day had—unwittingly or otherwise—pointed. Through the lens of the agent-relative probability threshold, Pettit’s and Bovens’ work can be seen as attempts to build in elements of the agent-relative factors: Bovens’ mental imaging criterion is a way of assessing whether an agent is engaged with a prospect *to the degree* that it constitutes a hope, and Pettit’s acting-as-if criterion is another way of assessing if *a particular agent* finds a hope worth consideration to the extent that they would behave or plan in certain ways. These are indirect measurements insofar as they pertain to behaviours whose presence is taken as indicative of hope, and in this way may vary with respect to their ability to reliably indicate the presence of actual *hope*. In fact, this was Meirav’s complaint with Pettit’s and Bovens’ accounts—that they are only accurate if one assumes that the hope supervenes on the combination of desire and probability assessment. Recall that Meirav deems this assumption problematic because it leaves us “unable” to distinguish between hope and despair in some contexts.

At this point, Meirav might have concluded that Pettit’s and Bovens’ attempts to bolster the Standard Account by adding criteria referring to hope’s behaviours did not tell us enough *about the agent* in order to distinguish whether one’s desire, probability assignment, and behaviour amount to a hope or not. This is the kind of approach Williams suggests in her argument that the probability threshold for hope needs to be *defined according to what a particular agent judges to be sufficient*. However, as we know, Meirav instead posited that it had to have been something *other* than the agent, something in *the world* that remained to be incorporated into the Standard Account if it was going to be capable of distinguishing hope from despair in *all* cases. Given what I have argued, alongside Williams, about the force of Meirav’s

examples and the implicit importance of the agent-relative aspect of hope, it appears Meirav shifted away from those kinds of concerns that Day and Downie originally expressed as importantly linked—albeit, bracketed—to a theory of hope. It is difficult to say which factors prompted Meirav to exclude the agent’s character in his attempt to bolster the Standard Account. However, it is also difficult not to wonder whether this may be in some way continuous with the Standard Accounts’ original presentation of agent-relative concerns as separable from the more easily defined, minimum conditions of probability assignment and desire.

Although it is unlikely that Day and Downie meant to imply that hope could be identified in *all* cases without needing to appeal to facts about the agent, later philosophers were indeed left to build hope theory on the back of their account which set the particularities of the agent aside (if only in the interest of scope). Subsequently, Pettit’s, Bovens’, and Meirav’s accounts did attempt to build in some features that would more accurately identify hope in more cases, but ran into problems creating criteria whose presence could reliably entail hope without being supplemented with additional information about the hoper. For example, Williams points out that Pettit’s acting-as-if criterion does not necessarily entail hope, since one might be planning for (acting “as if”) the worst to happen, while hoping for the best (Williams 2012, 191). Conversely, one might, from the outside, appear to be “acting as if” a prospect will obtain, while only going through the motions related to a prospect of which they despair. As for Bovens’ account, mental imaging as a criterion for hope certainly points to the significance of the agent’s own particular engagement with hope; according to Williams, “the plausibility of Boven’s claim hinges significantly on precisely what qualifies as ‘mental imaging’ or ‘mental engagement’” (Williams 2012, 191). In other words, *what the agent takes to be sufficient*, given their individual character, will impact whether mental imaging can be said to entail hope. We have already discussed

difficulties faced by Meirav's account, but it is also important to add here that Meirav, with his external factor account, faces related problems trying to pinpoint another factor that can distinguish hope from despair in special cases.

As Williams notes, Meirav explicitly states that an agent's conceiving of an external factor as good does *not* involve a probability assignment—rather, he sees it as the hoppers' perception that an external factor is “well disposed” toward them, or their belief in the goodness of that factor (Williams 2012, 194). However, this description seems to collapse into the Standard Account insofar as such a disposition correlates with “a likelihood that the physical world will ‘cooperate’ with one's desires” (Williams 2012, 194), which could also be modeled as a probability assessment. Thus, Meirav's take runs into the same issue as Pettit and Bovens: the external factor can only reliably indicate the presence of hope where it is supplemented with further information about a specific hoper. Just as Meirav charges that hope cannot be said to supervene on a desire and probability assignment combination, so it is with addition of the external factor: it is certainly possible that I could hope for an outcome in which all external factors might seem to be against me—a situation which might best be explained by appealing to other things about me.

Interestingly, despite his emphasis on the agent-externality of his account, Meirav ultimately states that “it is easier to understand what the goodness of an external factor amounts to if the external factor is conceived as a person” (Meirav 2009, 232). Meirav makes this comparison to suggest that people reason about hopes and other people in similar ways. Specifically, he asserts that the sense of *trust* one can instill in another person is representative of an appraisal of that person as benevolent, and it is this trust that is a deciding factor in whether or not one will hope or despair of a prospect. If the external factor can be seen as knowing how to

benefit the hoper, and as wanting to do so, this will in turn serve as a basis for hope (233). For all his attempts to avoid theorizing further about the agent, Meirav thus concludes his paper by describing the role of external factors *in terms of an agent*. Yet, again, the issue remains that hope cannot be taken to supervene on desires and probability assignments, even on an account bolstered by the addition of the external factor, without further reference to the particular hoper. The disposition to trust may vary greatly from person to person, meaning that where person *A* may trust, person *B* may not. Further, it is also possible, even if persons *A* and *B* did experience the same level of trust regarding the same external factor, that what counts as sufficient trust for hope may again vary in a way that limits the explanatory power of external factors, without further information about *A* and *B*.

Given what has been said about the importance about the agent-relative probability threshold for hope, I hope to have shown—with the help of Williams—that attempts to bolster the Standard Account with a third criterion are unable to reliably determine whether one hopes in *all* cases. A third criterion cannot account for relevant variability in the agent-specific factors contributing to an individual's own threshold for hope—what they will take as sufficient probability, and perhaps sufficient desire in order to justify hoping. Williams' prescription for hope is that we should understand it as such: "An agent *A* hopes that *p* if and only if *A* desires that *p* and assigns to *p* a non-zero, non-unity probability which *A* takes to be sufficient to give some point to continued consideration of *p*" (Williams 2012, 195). She points out that hope so described may be "rather unilluminating insofar as it does not tell us how to identify the relevant probability threshold for any given individual" (Williams 2012, 187).

This sort of statement seems congruent with Day and Downie's original decision to factor out the discussion of what it means to be "hopeful" on the grounds that it was outside the scope

of an account including the minimum necessary and sufficient conditions for hope. However, Williams' making explicit the agent-relative nature of the probability threshold more explicitly opens the door for exploration of those factors which can reasonably be taken to influence an individuals' threshold for hope. This is where my proposed Inclusive Account of hope becomes relevant. If the Standard Account can better identify hope when it is revised to incorporate, as important, *what an agent takes as sufficient to hope*, it may be strengthened by also taking into account factors which plausibly influence *how* a person hopes, and *whether* they will see an occasion as an opportunity for hope or reason to despair. In other words, factoring into the account the importance of an agent's disposition with regards to hope can increase our accuracy in separating cases of hope from cases that are not hope.

I see no reason why psychological research about hope should be off limits in this investigation, especially since this research utilizes self-report and personal accounts of hope and despair. Earlier, we saw that the psychological literature contains a wealth of information about the very factors that contribute to a person either disposed or indisposed to hope. Specifically, we explored the ways in which the CDF and SAF help explicate how one's environment is always already shaped by the hoper's perceptions, depending on their sense of trust or mistrust of the world, responsiveness to the world, and their active engagement with it. I suggest we see these factors as potential guidelines when identifying an agent's own threshold for hope. This is in large part because of the way in which the CDF and SAF tell us more about the hoper than simply *that* a hoper desires that *p*, or *whether* they think *p* neither impossible nor certain. Rather, because the CDF and SAF tell us something about the way hopers see or *experience* the world, which tells us more about *that particular agent herself*, instead of telling us about a disembodied desire, probability assignment, or external factor.

Originally, Downie and Day neglected to account for a hopeful disposition as part of the Standard Account because this complex task extended far beyond their original aims. Philosophers such as Nancy Snow and Michael Lamb have recently developed such detailed, dispositional accounts of hope.<sup>32</sup> Here, I am not proposing anything so complicated as merging a dispositional account of hope with the Standard Account. Instead, I suggest that if we take Williams' advice, and add the agent-relative caveat to the existing philosophical definition of hope, philosophers ought also consider CDF and SAF as illuminating factors for painting a fuller picture of hope. This means, instead of building another catchall criterion into the Standard Account when a borderline case of hope arises, philosophers would build some flexibility into their accounts by examining the ways in which a particular hoper's developmental histories and self-styled agentic thought might contextualize the more abstract criteria of the Standard Account.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a similar account, see (Day 1991).

<sup>2</sup> For other additional bids to expand upon the standard account, see Govier 2011, Kadlac 2015, and Lamb 2016.

<sup>3</sup> See Erdman 2013.

<sup>4</sup> See Downie 1963, 250.

<sup>5</sup> See Meirav 2009, Pettit 2004, and McGeer 2004 for convincing objections and alternative accounts.

<sup>6</sup> Meirav further illustrates an example inherited from Bovens, concerning the film *The Shawshank Redemption*. For more, see Meirav 2009, 222-223.

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<sup>7</sup> For further explanation of Meirav's approach to subjective probability here, see Kaplan 1996, especially page 15.

<sup>8</sup> Meirav makes it clear that the external factor is not necessary for distinguishing hope from despair in all cases, such as those in which probability assignments are relatively high (Meirav 2009, 231).

<sup>9</sup> See McGeer 2004; Govier 2011, Calhoun 2018.

<sup>10</sup> See Averill et al. 1990, 150.

<sup>11</sup> "Subjects rated their perceived control over the event of an 11-point scale. The scale ran from 0 ('completely due to factors under your own control') to 10 ('completely due to factors beyond your control')" (Averill et al. 1990, 25).

<sup>12</sup> It is possible that this result could be an artefact of the western college student population used in this study, specifically where the socially desirable response of working harder, and the proto-rule of hope concerning the inappropriateness of hoping for things that are not socially accepted, e.g. malicious outcomes.

<sup>13</sup> For one of the earliest formulations of the theory, see (Snyder, et al. 1991).

<sup>14</sup> See Snyder 1994, especially pp. 9–12.

<sup>15</sup> For further examples of self-referential thinking indicative of hope levels, see Snyder 1994, (44–45; 84–88).

<sup>16</sup> See Shorey 2014.

<sup>17</sup> For a related account of this feedback loop see Bandura 1977 on "self-efficacy."

<sup>18</sup> See Bishop 2016 for further reading on the ubiquity of self-reinforcing "positive causal networks" in positive psychology.

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<sup>19</sup> The self-reinforcing cycle Snyder references here corresponds with the experiences of many of Snyder's research participants and is closely related to Albert Bandura's theory of "self-efficacy" (Bandura, 1977).

<sup>20</sup> See: Snyder 1994, 84; van Leishout 1979, 179.

<sup>21</sup> See: Bowlby 1969, 11: "What is believed to be essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with [his or her primary caregiver] in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment." This describes what Bowlby calls a "secure" attachment.

<sup>22</sup> This corresponds to McGeer's 2004 characterization of hope as a "scaffolding."

<sup>23</sup> See Bai and Repetti 2015.

<sup>24</sup> See also Ainsworth 1975; Ong et al. 2006.

<sup>25</sup> See also Ainsworth and Bell, 1974.

<sup>26</sup> See Erikson, 1963: "Infants should develop a continuity and dependability about their environment if they have quality relationships with primary caregivers during the first two years" (Erikson, 1963 as cited in Snyder 1994, 88).

<sup>27</sup> Note that this satisfies Meirav's concern about the sense of trust or mistrust of the world.

<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Shorey et al. found that parenting styles that encouraged agency through engaged support and discipline contributed to the attachment, and the hopeful thinking lead to positive mental health outcomes (Shorey et al. 2014, 691).

<sup>29</sup> Here I use the notion of being-in-the world in a Merleau-Pontian sense, with the aim of characterizing hope as a dynamic process which does not take place either entirely within the "subjective" world or mind of the hoper, nor as a response to "objective" stimuli from an external environment. The term being-in-the-world for Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the lack of



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clear boundaries between oneself and one's world due to a "fundamental ambiguity of all human experience and phenomena (PhP, lxxviii, as cited in Landes 2013, 29). For Merleau-Ponty we are uniquely situated within the world thanks to our bodies, thanks to which our way of existing "is not a relation between an objective body and a consciousness; rather, it is a 'pre-objective perspective' that undermines the very distinctions between first person and third person perspectives, and thus represents a genuine intertwining between consciousness and nature (PhP 81, as cited in Landes, 29).

<sup>30</sup> My approach in this section will draw largely on a methodology inspired by Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which the author critiques philosophical views by exploring the ways in which certain theoretical commitments lead theorists to conclusions that gloss over or betray aspects of phenomena *as they are actually experienced*.

<sup>31</sup> For one account of such norms or "proto-rules" of hope, see Averill et al. 1990, 33-35.

<sup>32</sup> See: Snow 2013; Lamb 2016.

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